



Dana E. Blackwell  
Executive Director

## LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW  
DR. HARRIETTE WILLIAMS, CHAIR

### APPROVED MINUTES

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The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **April 19, 2004**, in room 140 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

#### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Patricia Curry  
Joyce Fahey  
Brenda Galloway  
Phalen G. Hurewitz  
Helen Kleinberg  
Christina S. Mattingly  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Sandra Rudnick  
Adelina Sorkin  
Dr. Harriette Williams

#### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Carol O. Biondi  
Daisy Ma  
Trinity Wallace-Ellis, Youth Representative

#### APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the April 19, 2004, meeting was unanimously approved as changed; reports from the 300/600, Childcare Policy Roundtable, and Regional Center committees were delayed until a subsequent meeting.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes for the April 5, 2004, general meeting were unanimously approved.

## **CHAIR'S REPORT**

- Chair Williams reminded Commissioners that some parking passes were reaching their expiration dates; the office should be notified regarding renewal. Also, if Commissioners require new supplies of business cards, they were asked to let the office know.
- Chair Williams thanked the work group leaders for their efforts on the three Children's Planning Council initiatives—really four, since the relative caregiver committee is assisting in permanency efforts.
- A summary of the clearances required by law for departmental clients was distributed. Commissioners Fahey and Curry will be researching the issue brought up at April 5th meeting regarding foster-care clearances through LiveScan and through the California Law Enforcement Telecommunications Systems (CLETS). Commissioner Kleinberg asked that the Commission look at the system as a whole.
- As mentioned in a note from Chair Williams, executive director Dana Blackwell is out on an extended medical leave. All those wishing to contribute to a gift for Ms. Blackwell were asked to see Chair Williams.
- Chair Williams recently visited the Casey Family Foundation with Marcia Buck and Jacquie Dolan to become more aware of its work around relative care. Casey is currently partnering with the Community Coalition in SPA 6 on a relative support center. It is also sponsoring an all-day conference on April 20, the morning session of which Chair Williams will attend.
- Chair Williams also recently visited a Kinship Center in Santa Ana with department representatives Russ Carr and Madeline Jackson. The center handles adoptions and referrals at the high end, so was not precisely what was expected; however, it is an outstanding agency. Materials are available in the Commission office.
- The first Prevention Committee's stakeholders' meeting was very successful, with nearly 50 people attending to discuss how to approach front-end services differently.

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

- Dr. Sanders distributed a chart showing how the time from initial placement to adoption has decreased over the past three fiscal years from more than 58 months to just over 42 months. The segment of the process that has decreased the most is the time from the termination of parental rights (TPR) to adoptive placement, when the department is doing its home study.

The time from adoptive placement to completion has also been reduced—from more than two and a half months to a matter of weeks—because the department is beginning the work of completion earlier, focusing on it prior to the formal TPR.

What has reduced least is the nearly three years children spend in placement prior to TPR. That is still too long, Dr. Sanders said, despite the deployment of permanency planning liaisons who are meant to initiate adoption assessments in the regions. Federal law requires that this segment in the process take no longer than 18 months, yet it has been reduced by only a few weeks. Other segments are now in compliance.

Asked by Commissioner Kleinberg about the impact of concurrent planning on this timeframe, Dr. Sanders said that a structure to integrate concurrent planning into the department's work is being developed and will be brought to the Commission soon. Training in concurrent planning has been underway for the last seven years; no formal structure has been in place, however, so it has never taken hold. Moving adoption workers into the regions was a good first step, Dr. Sanders said, but there also needs to be a deeper understanding of adoption within the regions. Concurrent planning involves a large number of staff, and there are possible changes to workloads that need to be discussed with the union.

Commissioner Curry congratulated Dr. Sanders on having reduced the overall time to adoption so dramatically, and asked for details on how it was done. One factor, Dr. Sanders said, was the recent edict for all home studies to meet the same requirements, a mandate causing the department to complete 1,600 home studies in four months. The resulting consolidated home study has also had a big structural effect that should be permanent. Another change has been in providing materials earlier to attorneys for finalization, instead of waiting until everything is complete.

Commissioner Fahey remarked that the time from placement to completion is primarily taken up by the court process. Where the harm to children results is when family reunification is attempted for as long as three or four years prior to adoption. Dr. Sanders admitted to delays in getting families services for various reasons, and said that the department should provide earlier, more comprehensive data on their availability. Services should be in place by the six-month hearing.

Another impediment noted by Commissioner Fahey was the several months' delay caused by the legally required notices and publications. Dr. Sanders agreed that the concurrent planning model should look at reducing some of these inherent impediments.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked about the impact of drug and alcohol addiction in the timeframe to adoption—waiting lists for rehabilitation programs, for instance. Dr. Sanders will find out if the department tracks that kind of information.

When asked by Commissioner McClaney about the department's proposed methodology for reducing the overall time adoptions take, Dr. Sanders named structural support for concurrent planning, providing reunification services more quickly, integrating adoptions into the regions, using the consolidated home study, etc.

From the audience, a representative from the Alliance for Children's Rights expressed both her happiness with the overall statistics and her continuing concerns about the

permanency planning liaisons, the training of the regional workers who are doing adoption assessments, and the overall quality of the adoptions process. Another audience member asked whether the department would again consider the help of private foster family agencies with adoption licenses, something the union has vetoed in the past. Dr. Sanders acknowledged the concern, but said that contracting out adoption services has not been considered so far.

- The Child Welfare League of America and two other groups recently convened the leaders of the children's services systems in Illinois, New York, and Los Angeles, and Dr. Sanders was interested to note more similarities than differences in the three systems, which have roughly comparable numbers of children in care. Among the differences were that both New York and Illinois have privatized basic case management (unlike Los Angeles), that Illinois has incentivized adoptions but not family reunification, and that New York has twice as many children in group homes as does Los Angeles. It is hoped that these three systems can continue to learn from each other.

Commissioner Hurewitz remarked that both New York's and Illinois's systems had undergone dramatic recent changes, and asked if any insights had been shared. New York has extremely strong mayoral support for a long-term strategic agenda, Dr. Sanders said, while Illinois's system is similar though with not quite the same focus. The key is a long-term, consistent plan that advocates a change in culture. Between 80 and 90 percent of Illinois's workers are privatized (employed by private agencies that contract with the government, rather than the government itself), and New York is revamping the supervisorial level of its civil service system. No oversight bodies equivalent to the Commission itself exists in either New York or Illinois.

## **WORKGROUP REPORT—Prevention**

### **First 5 L.A.'s Partnerships for Families**

The lead agency for the Partnerships for Families (PFF) effort, Children's Institute International, was represented by executive director Mary Emmons, program director Sylvia Castillo, and Dr. Hershel Swinger. Ms. Emmons acknowledged First 5 L.A. staff in the audience, and thanked Commissioner Hurewitz—the Commission's representative to First 5—for his work with PFF, which is coordinating with the Prevention Workgroup.

In January 2004, First 5 L.A. selected Children's Institute International to lead and coordinate the PFF team, which includes the Community Development Technical Center run by Denise Fairchild and the Child Welfare League of America, which will provide a national component for research, advocacy, and training. Program director Sylvia Castillo—a pediatric nurse who is one of the co-founders of the Community Coalition and has also worked with The *California* Endowment—recently joined the team.

The original name of Partnerships for Families was the Child Abuse Prevention Initiative, or CAPI. The effort focuses on secondary child abuse prevention and is designed to prevent child maltreatment in high-risk populations by creating opportunities for families, communities, and government to partner in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. First 5 has adopted a community partnership model that promotes shared responsibility

and the engagement of residents and service providers, along with a new way of doing business between all public agencies. Several current initiatives share similar concepts, including the child welfare redesign, departmental changes, and the Children's Planning Council's community planning efforts. PFF is looking for ways to align with those efforts.

First 5 has dedicated \$50 million over five years to the four stages of PFF:

- Program design (approximately six months), when the team will involve stakeholders in learning, coordinating, and building on resources that already exist, as well as in refining the initiative's criteria for First 5
- A community planning process that will select lead agencies to be awarded six-month, \$50,000 planning grants to develop networks that involve residents, services providers, and county representatives; perform asset-mapping; and develop four-year action plans
- The implementation phase
- The development of sustainable community resources that promote community ownership, ongoing services and funding, and new community norms

Commissioner Kleinberg stated that sustainability is always a serious problem for new initiatives, which often don't survive once initial funding is gone. Addressing this in the start-up phase is key. She then asked about First 5's focus on children birth to five years old—are families to be served by PFF required to have at least one child in that age group? Ms. Emmons said yes, even though the focus will be on the whole family.

Commissioner Kleinberg inquired if community-specific approaches would be encouraged, and Ms. Castillo responded that this could not be a 'one size fits all' approach, and much care would be taken to collect accurate demographic information and develop culturally appropriate approaches.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked about lessons learned from the lead-agency-based family preservation effort, and Dr. Swinger replied that excellent supervision and solid methodology were vital to success. Family preservation functioned within the context of other efforts in the community, and the structure builds together. It can take a long time.

Ms. Emmons added that PFF has looked at some foundation-sponsored programs but not specifically at family preservation as a model. PFF is particularly an effort to engage residents and other entities, not just service providers. Rather than simply funding hours of services, as most programs do, First 5 deliberately chose also to fund a training and technical assistance component that focuses on community- and network-building. The initial program-design phase will look at aligning existing efforts, seeing how they relate, and connecting the social fabric in the community to prevent child abuse. Integration with early childhood services is also planned, since the targeted children are not yet in school. Substance abuse treatment services, domestic violence services, preventive health care,

First 5's existing parent information warmline—all will be considered as part of the cultural landscape.

Commissioner Hurewitz asked for the formal definition of 'secondary prevention,' and Ms. Emmons explained that this nomenclature targeted high-need populations, families with elevated risk factors for child abuse and neglect—hotline referrals to the department, teen parents, substance abusers, gang members, incarcerated parents, and so on. Commissioner Curry suggested also involving a broad spectrum of disciplines—law enforcement, jobs, housing—and Dr. Swinger asked her help in developing invitations to participate for these related entities.

Ms. Emmons expressed her optimism about the process, especially now that awareness of the importance of integration and collaboration is so high. Commissioner Williams echoed that hope, yet expressed her impatience with the six-month planning process. Much of the information-gathering and demographic study has been done by other groups, and little needs to be started from scratch. A First 5 staff member spoke from the audience in appreciation of her comment, but stated that First 5 had learned from some of its initial swift funding decisions that a more strategic, careful approach was ultimately more successful. Commissioner Kleinberg cautioned about the competition the planning-grant process could engender, and Ms. Castillo said that the RFP would be tailored very carefully.

Commissioner Sorkin asked about a customer focus, something that county government is finally beginning to move toward. Community-based organizational may not, in fact, be connected to the variety of communities in their areas, and language and nuance are very important. Dr. Swinger agreed that a major challenge of the PFF process would be diversity—functioning in a way neither colorblind nor ethnically specific to get services to children.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Adoptions Committee**

Commissioner Hurewitz said that Dr. Sanders's report had already outlined the department's progress toward an ideal adoptions process, and further data would be made available to the Commission.

- Adoptions staff are currently colocated in five out of the eight service planning areas, and the remainder have 'virtual' colocation with the help of electronic connections.
- Of the 2,085 home studies recently fast-tracked, 80 percent were complete as of a month ago. These are the 120-day consolidated home studies for both adoptive and foster families.
- Elan Melamid has resigned from his position as head of the Adoptions Division, and Diane Wagner is serving as the interim head. A search process will be initiated.

Commissioner Sorkin said that the ASFA evaluation required a standardized home study, and Dr. Sanders said that the relative-home piece has started to be consolidated. The next step, to take place this month, is to consolidate the adoptions and foster care pieces.

Commissioner Curry suggested convening Adoptions Committee members, departmental representatives, and adoptions judges for a half-day forum to discuss obstacles to reducing children's time in care prior to the termination of parental rights, perhaps as a segment of the Partnership Conference. Commissioner Fahey said that the courts are often lenient in granting continuances to proceedings during this time, sometimes inappropriately. Even though these court decisions are grave ones—parents are, after all, losing their rights to their children—judges may not be aware of the impact of their actions. If a conversation can identify some of these issues, perhaps they can be changed. Dr. Sanders agreed that a forum was a good idea.

Commissioner Kleinberg saw the 'six-month mentality,' where processes that could go forward more rapidly are delayed until the required hearing date, as another barrier. Commissioner Sorkin further urged that all pertinent information be gathered at detainment, since there is often a delay in serving papers to parties whose addresses are not in the file. A nonoffending parent can often be a potential placement for a child. Commissioner Williams mentioned that Santa Ana hires private detectives for the extended family search. Dr. Sanders noted that the information a case investigator wants often differs from that needed by adoptions staff, and information can be lost.

Commissioner Kleinberg said that in her meetings with parenting teens under the jurisdiction of the department, there is a pervasive fear that their own children will be taken away. Dr. Sanders did not know if statistics bore out that fear, but Miriam Krinsky from the Children's Law Center said that it was an issue she kept hearing about, though there is a frustrating lack of data. Information on parenting teens is tracked through an optional field in CWS/CMS, not a mandatory one. Commissioner Rudnick urged the dissemination of information to all teens on contraception, which Ms. Krinsky said was part of her work with the department.

### **Education Committee**

- The invitational education summit planned for May 14 is only one of many events during that month to raise the awareness of educational issues in the foster-care system. The summit's structure will be similar to that of last year, taking more than 50 recommendations and presenting a snapshot of the issues. It is nearly certain that the Education Coordinating Council will be funded for its two kick-off years. Already more than 85 attendees have registered.
- Commissioner Kleinberg reported problems with the Los Angeles Unified School District's contract for special educational services, as County Counsel is maintaining that schools are paid to provide counseling. Discussions are ongoing to find an alternative way to provide these services.
- The Los Angeles County Office of Education contract to expand services to foster youth is also pending.

- Commissioner Curry announced that the RFP for HELIX went out on March 1; responses are expected by the end of April.

### **CWS Redesign Steering Committee**

This entity has changed its name to the Outcomes and Accountability Committee; it is the body that will receive the recommendations of the workgroups studying the three recommendations from the Children's Planning Council. Using guidelines from the state, this committee will provide a snapshot of the department and oversee the office-to-office peer review process within the department.

Dr. Sanders stated that this committee functions as a mandated mechanism to report to the state, getting work done without adding another layer to outcomes and accountability efforts by the three workgroups. The three workgroups are aligned with the three departmental goals, and their recommendations will serve to develop specific outcomes. It is hoped that all the various work being done around accountability can be pulled together and reconciled.

Commissioner Williams inquired as to the department's transition to align with the county's service planning areas (SPAs) rather than its own regions, and Dr. Sanders explained the difficulties with the SPA structure because of a lack of alignment with law enforcement.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Commissioner Hurewitz requested an agenda item at a future meeting to hear a presentation regarding Regional Centers.

### **MEETING ADJOURNED**